

June 11, 2023

Pr. Steve

Texts: Hosea 5: 15-6:6; Romans 4: 13-25; Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit.

Some context for today's texts. This is a test: Jesus came to—A. Create a new humanity. Or—B. Start a new religion. Which is it? [Congregation] "A". Very good! This is really important. xxx

Trinity Sunday (last Sunday): our God is a dance, (remember that?), dancing compassion and wisdom into this world. Our God is a dance—not just Jesus.

The Abba/Imma, great mystery, hidden, coming out of this seeming absence, generating life and love. The Son, embodying that wisdom in human form. The Spirit, inspiring and enlightening us—us!

Pentecost, yes, second kind of energy—Radiant Love—which is not subject to the second law of thermodynamics. (Got it? I'll explain it later. Those of you who do get it—it's really important. We'll talk about it another time; it demands a lot of attention.)

All of this to create the Beloved Community, a new way of being, a partnering with life and creation, the fullness, which is also a reversal of world order, that ordinary scope of things. It turns everything inside out, upside down. It's not the same world, because in the Beloved Community, the last are first, and the first become last. And the sick get healed, and everything is organized around the infinite mercy of God.

Jesus is always moving closer toward us, and especially, toward the poor and the impoverished, the losers and the lost, the despicable, the discarded, the despised, and the dead. Today, he says to a tax collector [named Matthew], *'Follow me.'* Now I need to say for the record, Matthew has no spiritual qualifications—just like us. That's why we're all invited in, you see. This is not for the experts. This is not for the really good spiritual people. It's wide-open, endlessly. We keep getting invited in, just like tax collectors. So, they go to have a party with his buddies. *'Hey, guess what I'm going to do!'*

And the Pharisees are offended. *'Jesus, why are you always doing this? Why do you have to be so reckless, so careless? Why do you have to contaminate our religion with these people who you know are no good, and they're outsiders, and they just don't count? Why are you always hanging with them?'*

And Jesus says, *'Because I'm a physician. I'm here for the sick. The healthy, those people who think they are righteous, they don't need me. Go, and learn the meaning of the words from the prophet Hosea [Hosea 6:6], when he says "God says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice."'*

Now sacrifice we know as a Code Word. (We're getting tuned in these days, aren't we?) Sacrifice is a code word for the Tradition, the Law, the Rules, the Devices, the Arrangements, the Protocols, the Processes--which protect us from having to act mercifully. *'Does she really deserve it (mercy)? Shall we look?' 'I'm not sure that he's earned it.' 'We have prophecies here. We have things in good order, right? We have standards; we are good people.'* Anything to obscure, shut down, diminish mercy. *'Let's not go there.'*

Learn what it means: *'Mercy is what I desire—not sacrifice.'* This love of Jesus is always defined by the quality of mercy. I suppose in English we should always say, *'the merciful love of God in Christ Jesus'*. It's always, always merciful, enacting the infinite mercy of God. This unconditional love is a single movement towards God and the other, towards God and those in need, towards God and neighbor. It's not two separate projects—'I'll try to love God up there, out there, somewhere, (right?) and then, now and then will help people now and then on the side. To love (this is dangerous now)—to love Diane is to love God. It's a singular movement of which we are a part.

We cannot understand Jesus apart from mercy—let alone follow him, and live life with him. *"Love your enemies." "Do good to those who hate you." "Bless those who curse you."* That's insane! It's crazy--until we begin to understand that the work of mercy is about our hearts. It's about transforming us. Not the world, not the other folks. It's about healing us to see the world through the eyes of mercy. This is the good work that's going on inside of us--day by day, week by week--our healing, and our transformation.

Now it's also true that the one quality and capacity which human beings do not have naturally is mercy. That's one we don't have. Nobody is born being merciful, nobody. Now we all know, we all feel how much we need mercy (right?), but when it comes to sharing mercy with others, we are so stingy. *"When will you measure up, Ric?". "I'm justified here." "It's time to become responsible, Christa." "You can't let people get away with anything and everything, can you, Jim?" "When are you going to become an adult, Howard?"* Oh, anybody ever said those kinds of things, in our heads, 50 times a week? But that's us and justifies our not being merciful. *'Ahhh, I'm off the hook again!'*

It is not enough to be good. (Can I get an Amen?) It is not enough to be good. And that's what we say to each other all the time, don't we? *'I'm just trying to get goodness (?) and hang out with good people.'*

The elder brother in the Story of the Prodigal was a good person—he did everything right; he followed the rules, he stayed at home; he did hard work; he was obedient—but he just had no mercy for his younger brother. And therefore, he never became a free human being.

*'Can you come heal my dead daughter? She's twelve.'*

What a question in a public place! This ruler just wanted, *'Can you help my dead daughter?'* (Why don't all of us get up and walk out of here? What is this guy doing? That's not real. That's got nothing to do with reality. What kind of question is that?) And Jesus says, *'Sure, let's go.'*

And on the way, there's a woman who's been ill for twelve years, hemorrhaging. And she says, *"If I can just touch the hem of his garment, just touch the hem, I'll be OK."* Jesus, stops, turns, *"My daughter, take heart. You are made well."*

*'Let's go.'*

Who is this guy? They go to the home of the dead daughter as she's laying out there, and Jesus takes her hand. Check out the bulletin cover, would you please? It's all about him today. Look at that. It's something like this--taking the hand of the dead girl in his own, got it? Just as the ill woman touched him, so now he touches this child so she can be healed.

In the name of love, Jesus does everything and anything that it takes to relativize, to break through all the obstacles that get in the way. Traditions, rules, laws, protocols, tabus—he brushes them away like cobwebs, in order to touch, to heal, to bless, to love, to make mercy real.

This divine mercy draws everyone to Jesus—all the sinners, all the losers, all the lost, all those who reach out—because no one shall be excluded. If we are not drawn by love, then we shall be drawn by merciful forgiveness.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.